

THE PRESS

NEWSPAPERS

Frustration in Atlanta

Eight years ago, Eugene Patterson stepped into the shoes of the legendary Ralph McGill as editor of the Atlanta Constitution. Responsible for the editorial page, he soon filled it with some of the most literate and penetrating political commentary in the South. His editorials reasoned relentlessly against the racism of Georgia's whites and the demagoguery of its politicians. His own daily column won him last year's Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing. Last week the columns stopped abruptly as Patterson, fed up with the Constitution's management, resigned.

The source of his unhappiness was

respondent in Washington, and the correspondent's activity is largely restricted to reporting the utterances of Georgia's Senators and Congressmen. Patterson and other editors have argued for more money for their staff and more coverage of the news, but their efforts have met with little success.

Patterson's frustrations came to a head two weeks ago, over an article by a bright young girl columnist named B.J. (for Billie Jo) Phillips. Three weeks ago, her editorial page column tackled the Georgia Power Co., which is seeking a rate increase to offset the 10% federal income tax surcharge.

Out Looking. There is no evidence that Georgia Power complained, but its influence is so pervasive in Atlanta that



EDITOR PATTERSON



COLUMNIST PHILLIPS

Against pervasive Power.

obvious. Like most newsmen on the Constitution and its sister Atlanta Journal, Patterson, 44, has often complained about the pinchpenny policies of the papers' owner, James Cox, and Cox's chief executive officer, President Jack Tarver of Atlanta Newspapers, Inc. Salaries are so low that many of the Constitution's most talented reporters have left Atlanta to go to work for other newspapers. Tarver simply replaces them at around \$100 a week with earnest young men who flock to Atlanta from all over the South, drawn mostly by the reputations of Patterson and Publisher McGill.

Why Pay More? News coverage is severely damaged by Tarver's refusal to establish bureaus or send reporters to cover stories outside Atlanta. The paper, for example, did not even send its own man to cover the 1965 disturbances

it does not have to. The night the column appeared, B.J. learned that Tarver felt her column should be limited to "topics she is qualified to write about." Next morning B.J.'s resignation was on Patterson's desk.

Patterson, upset, demanded that the resignation be rejected and that he maintain control of his editorial page. When Tarver refused, Patterson himself resigned, and was hired as managing editor of the Washington Post, replacing Benjamin Bradlee, who became the Post's top editor when J. R. Wiggins was appointed U.N. delegate (see THE NATION). B.J. also got a job at the Washington Post. Back in Atlanta, Tarver put in his own man to run the editorial page: Reg Murphy, 34, a freelance writer who once served as the Constitution's political editor. Three years ago, he had resigned from the paper because he thought it was being damaged by Tarver's tight purse strings.